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FOR WHA/CEN DAVID WOLFE, CHRISTOPHER ASHE

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [BH](#)
SUBJECT: BELIZE FAREWELL CALLS TO FM AND PM: UNUSUAL
COMMENTS

REF: (08) BELMOPAN 503

Classified By: Ambassador Robert Dieter for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary. During a candid farewell call with the Ambassador, the Foreign Minister/Attorney General (FM) stated that both he and the Prime Minister (PM) were unhappy with the performance of the Chief Justice (CJ). The FM also mentioned that he was certain the former Prime Minister and former Minister of Home Affairs would not be convicted on their pending theft charges because they would buy, intimidate or otherwise taint the jury (reftel). In the Ambassador's farewell call to the PM, the PM reaffirmed his commitment to put an end to corruption and the excesses of the past.8 End Summary.

¶2. (C) The Foreign Minister/Attorney General was more candid than usual during his January 8 farewell call with the Ambassador. Among topics discussed, the Ambassador raised the shortcomings of the justice system. FM stated that both he and the Prime Minister were unhappy with the CJ's performance as an administrator. He stated twice that he thought the Chief Justice often made decisions based on favoritism to certain counsel rather than strictly legal considerations. In some instances, he felt the CJ had even ignored the factual record. He suggested that the CJ's Cambridge University education did not translate into his being an efficient or effective manager of the judicial process. He noted the wasted time taken up by justices reading their decisions from the bench rather than simply issuing published opinions. He cited a recent case where the judge took some four hours to read the decision to the attorneys. &We can certainly read a decision ourselves8 without having to personally appear in court and sit through this process.

¶3. (C) The FM remarked that the CJ is constantly requesting additional resources, especially additional judges, despite Belize having the highest ratio of judges to population in the Caribbean. He stated that the court's problems were not due to under-staffing, but were due to judges having a poor work ethic and, in some instances, a lack of intellectual capacity. Nevertheless, he noted that he has made multiple efforts to support the CJ's requests for additional resources, and that the FM fully expects to add a ninth judge to the Supreme Court this year.

¶4. (C) The FM briefly discussed the trial of the former Prime Minister and former Minister of Home Affairs who are both charged with theft of ten million dollars, grant proceeds from the Venezuelan government (reftel). He stated he was 100 percent certain the defendants would walk away from the charges despite his confidence that the Director of Prosecutions (DPP) has sufficient evidence to support the case and has sufficient resources to prepare the case for trial. &They (the former PM and former Minister of Home

Affairs) will buy or intimidate the jurors.⁸

¶5. (C) After the FM listed several other judges and CEOs that he believed were &hopeless and dumb,⁸ the Ambassador offered several suggestions to improve the judicial system, including publishing statistics on the number of cases assigned to each judge each term of court and the dispositions to show the public which judges are working and which are not. The Ambassador also emphasized that a modernized, effective court system is a prerequisite for attracting foreign investors. The FM agreed and said he would recommend some changes to the CJ.

¶6. (C) The farewell call to the Prime Minister on January 9 was casual and cordial. When discussing the crime situation in Belize, the PM said he &mourns the fact that children in his country are killing people so senselessly.⁸ He stated he had great confidence in his economic and finance teams. He indicated he is trying to lead by example and intimated that he is aware of &little things⁸ (i.e., corruption), but that if anyone in his cabinet is proven to have committed any &big⁸ transgressions, he would show them the door. He said he almost wished that this would happen so that he could demonstrate his commitment to eliminate the &excesses of the past⁸.

¶7. (U) The Ambassador thanked both the FM and PM for their cooperation, candor, and availability during his tenure. Both the Foreign Minister and the Prime Minister expressed their gratitude for the cooperation of the USG and of the Ambassador,s personal commitment and interest in the people of Belize during his tenure.

¶8. (C) Comment: The FM/AG has shared some candid and sometimes offbeat opinions of his colleagues in the past but has never shown such disdain for the Chief Justice. He demonstrated a marked shift of complaining about limited resources to complaining about the management of the justice system and the level of competence of some of the actors. The Prime Minister was warm and seemed very genuine about his commitment to reform and to put an end to corruption in the GOB. Both were clearly appreciative of USG efforts in Belize. End Comment.
FEATHERSTONE